

Cultural Guide to Chile:
A Practical Introduction

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Introduction

Many Foreign Service families who come to Chile are immediately struck by the country's geographic and economic similarity to the West Coast of the United States. Certainly the temperate climate, dry deserts, coastal and inland mountain ranges, wineries, and a large agricultural central valley would make any Californian feel right at home. While it might be useful to compare the similarities, it's also important to keep clearly in mind that Chile has a unique geography, as well as a distinct cultural character in many ways very different from our own. This guide is designed to give U.S. Government employees and their family members who are new to Chile a better understanding of Chilean culture and social practices. The publication is intended to be a practical, "how-to" guide to operating smoothly in a Chilean environment, whether you are meeting with your professional contacts, dining with Chilean friends, shopping in downtown Santiago or interacting with your domestic staff.

In any social or professional setting in which you find yourself in Chile, you will undoubtedly benefit from an understanding of why Chileans respond the way they do and what they expected of you. That way, you minimize your chances of either offending or being offended. Your tour will undoubtedly be more enjoyable and productive if you make the effort to understand Chilean culture and social practices.

Geographic Influences

Chile's geographic isolation—a product of the enormous desert in the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, the towering Andes to the east, and harsh Patagonia to the south—has had a profound effect on its historical, linguistic, and cultural development. This isolation made it possible for Chile to develop early on a uniquely and uniformly Chilean character; foreigners are struck by the relative homogeneity of the population in both physical appearance and cultural outlook.

Historical Developments

Pre-colonial Chile was populated by a number of culturally distinct indigenous groups. However, beginning with the arrival in the mid-16th century of Spanish conquerors and explorers, the original populations began to decline precipitously, mostly due to disease and warfare. By the early 19th century, most indigenous people were no longer offering resistance, with the notable exception of the Mapuche, who remained independent until finally subjugated to Chilean authority late in the 19th century.

Spain's interest in Chile was mainly agricultural, as there was little apparent mineral wealth and the Spanish needed to provide food, clothing and other staples to the capital of the Viceroyalty in Lima and the huge mining population at Potosí, Bolivia. Chile's fertile central valley was well suited for agricultural production and large haciendas developed under the control of a small number of powerful American-born Spaniards known as "criollos." This group, in the early 1800s, led the war for independence from Spanish royal authority.

After independence was won definitively at the Battle of Maipú in 1818, the agrarian system organized around the hacienda continued largely intact. Even as late as the early 20th century about 75 percent of Chile's population still worked on haciendas. Nonetheless, immigration and increasing mining and other non-agrarian economic activity gave rise to growing political participation by more of the population and the establishment of various political parties. Economic reform and modernization, however, were slow in coming and often hampered by the powerful elite who controlled or otherwise benefited from Chile's agricultural and mining sectors. When reforms were attempted, they often involved the creation of state-run enterprises. It was to a great extent this stagnant, entrenched economic system, as well as rising worker political opposition and the increasing willingness of the military to intervene in the political process that eventually culminated in the 1973 military coup d'état led by General Augusto Pinochet.

By 1977, Pinochet—on the advice of his now famous “Chicago Boys,” a group of University of Chicago-trained economists—had embarked on a new economic course designed to improve the economy by mixing privatization of state industries with measures to encourage the development of an export-driven economy. Chile continued to have economic ups and downs during the Pinochet period, but once the plebiscite of 1988 returned Chile to democracy, successive administrations stayed the free-market course, continuing to sell off state-run businesses, control inflation and push to open Chile's markets. Chile's economic growth from the late 1980s to the end of the 1990s was unprecedented in its history and brought Chile into the league of leading Latin American economies.

Chile Today

Largely the result of the economic policies of the 1980s and 1990s, Chile's economy today bears almost no resemblance to what it was at the beginning of the 1970s. Visitors to Santiago, the capital, cannot fail to notice the evidence of Chile's economic success and the modern, consumer-driven society it has spawned: glitzy shopping malls, modern business centers, and first-rate hotels abound. Cellular phones and late-model personal automobiles are ubiquitous. Nonetheless, not everyone has benefited from the country's economic prosperity; a sizable segment of the Chilean population remains underpaid and undereducated.

Ethnically, most Chileans trace their main roots in some way to Europe, especially Spain. According to the last census, only about 5 percent of the population of 15 million count themselves as ethnically indigenous. In addition to continued immigration from Spain, the 19th and 20th centuries saw a significant number of immigrants from Germany, Britain, Italy, and Yugoslavia. A small but statistically significant number emigrated from China, mostly to the north of the country, to work in the mines and build railroads.

Due in large part to its European roots and geographic isolation, Chile is a surprisingly homogenous society with an unmistakable national character. Chileans are more often than not Catholic, reserved, conforming, formal, hard-working, and conservative, although in polls most Chileans tend to characterize themselves as politically moderate. They tend to place primary importance on family above all else. In a somewhat contradictory vein, Chileans tend more often than many other Latin Americans to support social efforts like telethons, the arts or parks and to

organize petitions to effect changes in their communities. Santiaguinos like to think of themselves as cosmopolitan and fashionable. Nonetheless, many Chileans still retain pride and interest in the culture of the hacienda and its related cowboy (“huaso”) traditions, especially in September when traditional fairs and rodeos highlight this aspect of Chile’s past.

General Social Norms

Language

Due to some extent to their geographic isolation, Chileans have developed a version of Spanish that is quite colorful and idiomatic. It can therefore be especially risky to assume that a colloquial expression popular in another Latin American country will have the same meaning in Chile. Even innocent words can have very strong, sometimes vulgar, meanings. Check out the local meaning of idiomatic expressions before you use them. A good reference is *How to Survive in the Chilean Jungle* (available at the Embassy commissary) which can help you avoid some of the worst linguistic mistakes.

You will hear Chileans refer to “norteamericanos” as “gringos” or “gringas.” Most Chileans insist that the term does not carry the same kind of derogatory connotation that it might in some countries like Mexico. Chileans will insist that the word is used loosely to describe any English-speaking foreigner.

A characteristic of Spanish that often befuddles Americans is the use of “Usted,” the formal form of “you,” and “Tú,” a more familiar form. Americans tend to be less formal in both social and work settings and thus more likely to want to use “tú” as a matter of course. This easy informality, however, can sometimes cause problems, since it might offend the sensibilities of the person you are addressing. The best practice is to start with “Usted” and then let your Chilean acquaintance or colleague take the lead. If they are comfortable addressing you as “tú,” it is usually safe to assume you can do the same, especially if they are about your age or younger. If they use “Usted,” you should do the same. When in doubt, *always* use “Usted.”

Chileans commonly like to use diminutive forms of given names. For example, Juan becomes “Juanito”; Patricio becomes “Pato” or even “Patito.” They also sometimes use other nicknames like “flaca” (skinny) or “gordito” (little fat one). There are obvious dangers to foreigners in trying to copy this custom; unless you are perfectly sure you know how it works (which you likely won’t), you should probably stick to using someone’s proper name (unless invited to do otherwise).

Gestures

Hand gestures are also a potential source of problems for Americans in Chile. Here, as in most of Latin America, the A-OK sign that Americans commonly use (thumb and index fingers touching to form a circle) is a vulgar reference to a part of the body, not a stamp of approval. Pointing is generally considered rude. The index and middle fingers to us means victory or peace; to Chileans it is a rude sign. It is also not a good idea to beckon a waiter by wagging a finger or your hand. One finger held discretely in the air does the trick. The best thing to do is observe and then follow the lead of Chileans around you or ask your Chilean colleagues.

Personal Space

One thing you will soon notice about Chileans, whether you're at the grocery store, a reception, or at work, is that they define the term "personal space" differently from the way most U.S. expatriates do. Most of us like to keep about two feet between ourselves and an acquaintance or colleague when speaking. Chileans, on the other hand, maintain a much smaller personal space and have no problem getting right next to you, whether to speak to you or grab something off a grocery shelf in front of you. At the grocery store and in the shopping mall, this can often result in the feeling that you are being treated callously. At a party, you might have a strong urge to back away from your Chilean conversation partner, something you should consciously try to avoid doing, as it is considered rude.

Superstitions

There are some general superstitions about which it's good to be aware. Friday the 13th means nothing special to a Chilean. The unlucky day here is Tuesday the 13th. If you are a woman, never put your purse on the floor at a reception or restaurant; doing so will cause you to lose money soon. All kinds of superstitions related to luck or money surround the New Year. For example, giving someone yellow underwear at New Year's brings him or her good luck (obviously this one is for close friends or family only). Families usually eat lentils around the New Year, also to promote good luck. You can also put your gold ring in a champagne glass, if you want to try to insure that you have more money in the New Year. If you want to increase your chances to travel, you should walk around the block with a suitcase on New Year's Eve.

Social Roles and Relationships

Making Chilean Friends

Whether you find Chileans hospitable or not tends to be a matter of individual experience. Chileans tend to be oriented toward what we will refer to as their "inner circle." This is loosely defined as their extended family, which includes blood relatives, god family and other close, long-time family friends (many of whom they will refer to as "tía" or "tío"). It is possible to make good Chilean friends, but it requires more effort to maintain the relationship than in the States, since good friendships imply possible entry into the inner-circle, a step which is taken very seriously and tends to imply a lifetime commitment.

Chileans as Neighbors

American-style neighborliness characterized by casual, unannounced visits, borrowed eggs and sugar and friendly offers to water the plants while you're on vacation are almost unheard of. In part this is because Chileans lead busy lives, not to mention the fact that the maid can dash to the store for eggs and water the plants. Also, Chileans in neighborhoods like Santiago's La Dehesa or Santa Maria de Manquehue rarely appear on the street, except in their cars, so casual contact with them is difficult. In addition, you are not part of that extended family that was mentioned earlier and requires so much of a Chilean's time. It is not, however, impossible to have contact with your neighbors; it may, however, require you to take more initiative than you might generally be willing to take and may or may not be reciprocated.

Children and Teenagers

Chile is a very child-friendly place. Chileans tend to be very tolerant of young children in a variety of social settings. By our standards, young, upper-class Chilean children often appear to be loud, boisterous and unruly in public. Chilean children of the upper class generally tend to be better dressed than U.S. children. They are often left with their maids, even on weekends. It is very common for the maid to accompany the family on vacation, so that she can see to the needs of the children while the parents go out.

Pre-teens and teens in upper-class neighborhoods don't usually congregate to ride bikes, play street games or skateboard like U.S. children do. In suburbs like La Dehesa it is in fact uncommon for Chilean children living on the same street to know each other at all, because they don't usually go to the same private schools. Children in this age group are more likely to visit their school friends or cousins at their homes or to meet them at malls, cinemas or private clubs.

American parents are often surprised and a little dismayed by the level of freedom Chilean teenagers, even as young as thirteen, enjoy compared to American children. Many Chilean teens, even those in the wealthier classes, tend to have working parents, so kids commonly take buses or taxis to get around. However, Chilean kids rarely move around alone socially; they most often go to malls, parties, McDonald's, or Burger King in groups. Teenagers in this age group usually carry cellular phones, giving parents more peace of mind. In addition to having more mobility at a younger age, Chilean teenagers tend to schedule their parties to start much later than American teenagers do; often a party won't start until 11:00 p.m. and not end until 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. Obviously, it's up to the parent to decide how much freedom and late party going to accept.

Dating, Marriage and Divorce

Chilean teenagers tend to go out in larger groups more commonly than they go out as couples. Beyond their teenage years, Chilean youth are more likely to stay home with their parents longer: they very often attend university close to home and then remain at home (surrounded by the maid and all those "tías" and "tíos") after college while they save money and gain job experience. As a result, Chilean youth don't generally have as much privacy as U.S. youth do and this generally tends to keep dating on a less intimate level longer than for kids in the United States, (although this shouldn't be taken for granted or assumed in any individual case).

Most aspects of matrimony in Chile would be familiar to people in the United States. In Chile, however, divorce is illegal. There has been pressure for years for legislation that would legalize divorce, but no one can say with any surety if, when and how such legalization will occur. The unavailability of divorce has led to a number of social phenomena. For example, many couples cohabit for years and raise children outside of marriage, either because they do not wish to enter a partnership that cannot be legally ended or because they are married to other partners from whom they cannot get a divorce. Many couples seek annulments sanctioned by the Catholic Church, which may be granted even though the marriage may have produced children and/or lasted for many years. Obtaining annulments can be difficult and expensive, and is generally not an option for the less well-to-do. Despite the no-divorce constraints, there are some means that can be used to place some legal distance between married partners. For example, before marriage, a woman of means will sometimes have a contractual agreement drawn up called a

"separation of goods," so that property she brought to the marriage or inherits cannot be claimed by her husband.

The Elderly

The elderly in Chile benefit from the strong support of the extended family consisting of both blood relatives and godchildren. Many U.S. expatriates have observed that within the Chilean family, attitudes toward older people are generally warmer, more respectful, and more protective than in the United States. Elders are rarely relegated to nursing homes. Typically, in wealthier families the elderly are cared for at home, something made easier by the availability of ubiquitous, low-wage labor. There is generally a closer relationship between generations, resulting from frequent, continuing contact with grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Chilean youth are comfortable with elders in a way that many Americans have lost due to our greater geographic mobility and resultant emphasis on the nuclear family.

Social Situations

Dinner and Other Social Invitations

Despite their relatively closed social network, it is not unthinkable, and even likely, that from time to time you will receive an invitation to the home of Chilean contact or Embassy colleague. Don't, however, feel you have to wait for an invitation before you offer one. And always think twice before refusing an invitation from a Chilean to come to their home. Invitations, especially to dinner, are never lightly given.

It is considered rude to arrive on time for a social engagement hosted by a Chilean. If you arrive on time, you might find your host or hostess still getting ready; he or she probably won't be pleased to see you. Arriving between 15 to 30 minutes late is a good rule, even for a dinner invitation, since dinner is usually preceded by an offer of cocktails. It is not uncommon for dinner invitations to be offered for 8:30 pm, with the actual dinner not commencing until 10:00 or 10:30 pm. There is one exception to the above rule. Sometimes an invitation will include the words "hora inglés." This means that you should be there at the exact time indicated on the invitation.

If you are invited to the home of a Chilean friend or colleague for dinner, never offer to help clean up the dishes at the end of the meal. This is the maid's job. Even in the rare case where there is no maid, it's better not to bring up the subject of dishes. It is also considered rude to rush someone out the door or suggest they should leave; therefore, it is unlikely that your Chilean host will do this, no matter how late the hour. It is not uncommon for Chilean dinners to go until 1:00 or 2:00 a.m.

Greetings at Social Gatherings

The point to remember about greetings in Chile is that personal recognition is very important. At a small cocktail or dinner party, you are required to greet every individual and offer a few words of polite small talk. Women usually kiss each other lightly on the left cheek. Men, if they've met before and know each other, might give each other a casual hug while patting each other on the

back. Women and men usually kiss if they know each other; otherwise a handshake will generally do. This procedure is repeated at the end of the evening. An economical kiss to the gathered crowd at the beginning or end of the event won't suffice. Obviously, you have to use common sense here; you can't personally kiss and/or shake the hand of 400 guests at the Ambassador's 4th of July reception. Nonetheless, at smaller gatherings the object is to greet everyone and acknowledge their importance. Children (small ones, preteens and teenagers) are also expected to adhere to this custom.

Gifts

It is common practice to bring a gift to your hosts, usually flowers or a box of chocolates, especially if the invitation is for dinner. Bringing wine to a Chilean home is a bit like bringing coals to Newcastle, unless the wine is some special imported brand that you would like them to try. A male host will probably appreciate a gift of good Scotch or a bottle of liqueur. You can also have flowers sent ahead of time. If you forget to bring or send a gift, you can also have a florist drop an arrangement by the next day, or phone expressing your appreciation for a pleasant evening. A gift that is wrapped up might be opened in front of you, but this is a matter of choice. Don't forget to send a "thank you" note, phone or thank the hostess in person the day after the event, especially if it was a smaller, more personal affair.

Birthdays

It is still common for children to have birthday parties to which all of their classmates are invited, especially in the lower elementary grades. Where the typical class size is 20-22 children, as it is at Nido de Aguilas, this can be an onerous production. Many parents in Santiago, in order to avoid the mess and potential damage to their homes, organize a party at Chuck E. Cheese, Mampato (a local amusement park) or Gunter Mund (a local swimming club with an indoor pool). It is not, of course, required that you do this. At Nido de Aguilas many expatriate parents prefer to hold a low-key affair and invite only a few children. Chilean parents will usually offer a bigger party, but might limit the number of kids to closer friends and family. Sleepovers are also popular for smaller groups.

The usual pattern at most birthday parties is to organize games or hire professional entertainment and then bring out the cake. In the summer, a swimming party is common. Chileans sing the same birthday song that we do, translated into Spanish:

"Cumpleaños Feliz,
Te deseamos a ti
Feliz cumpleaños (insert name)
Que los cumplas feliz."

Often the gifts won't be opened in the presence of the guests at all.

When a daughter turns fifteen in Chile, it is customary to throw a big party called a "quinceañera." It's sort of a coming-of-age, debutante party to which family and friends are invited. In wealthier families, such a party can be quite elaborate and expensive. If your child is

invited, he or she might be expected to dress up. Gifts are, of course, a requirement as well. A typical quinceañera gift is gold jewelry.

Weddings, Baptisms, and Funerals

Most milestones follow the traditions typical of Roman Catholics in the U.S., with some important differences. For example, unlike in the United States, for a Chilean wedding it is very common to receive an announcement called a “participación.” A “participación” is sent to almost everyone who has a personal or business relationship with the bride, groom, or parents of either. If you receive a “participación,” you are being invited to attend the wedding ceremony at the church, but not the reception. Some Americans take offense at this, since they feel it implies that the invitee does not rate being included in the reception. Remembering that Chileans tend to reserve their milestones for their large inner circle of extended family (blood relatives, godparents, and closer friends) helps put this into perspective. A “participación” is considered a courtesy; you are not required to attend the ceremony, nor do you have an obligation to purchase a gift. However, depending on your relationship with the family, you might want to attend the ceremony and/or send a small token gift anyway, such as a book or small picture frame. Another accepted gift is to make a donation in the name of the couple to a local charity. Never bring the gift to the wedding, or to the reception if you are invited. Send your gift to the family either ahead of time or after the wedding.

The actual marriage ceremony differs in several ways from a U.S. wedding, most notably in the absence of a wedding party. There is no maid of honor or best man, nor are there bridesmaids or ushers. Instead the parents accompany the bride and groom to the altar and serve as informal witnesses. Also, most weddings (and the reception that follows) take place in the evening. Because of this, the dress code for guests is generally formal: dark suits are customary for men and cocktail or long dresses are customary for women. Until recently black was the most common color for women to wear; this, however, is starting to change.

An “invitación” to attend both the wedding and the reception is a great honor and should not be turned down, if at all possible. The reception will not be much different from what you would see at a reception in the United States, except that it is not customary to make formal toasts to the bride and groom; this is instead done at the individual tables as the couple makes the rounds. Usually there is no cake-cutting ceremony either.

Once the wedding is over, do not expect a formal “thank you” card, as you would receive in the United States. In Chile the newlyweds send out printed calling cards with nothing more than a line or two written on it. This is a well-accepted custom here and you should not take offense at the seeming lack of effort.

If your Chilean colleague or friend is having a baby, don’t wait for the baby shower invitation, because baby showers are not a Chilean tradition (except at the Embassy, where the tradition is known and often followed, even among the Chilean staff). It is not considered bad luck to give a gift before the birth, but more often the gift is given after the birth.

Baptisms tend to follow the same pattern as weddings, in the sense that you might get an announcement of the baptism and even go to the church, but any corresponding party would usually be for members of the inner circle only.

Funerals are usually held fairly promptly after death, as embalming and cremation are not generally done and interment must be done within 48 hours. There are no funeral homes in Chile, as we know them in the U.S., so flowers with a calling card are usually sent to the family's home. The deceased family member is normally taken to the church at which the funeral will be held. The usual procedure, if you know the family well, is to visit the church the evening before the service (usually 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.) to pay your respects. You should also go to the funeral if you know the family well. Usually only the inner-circle of family and friends go to the cemetery, although you would probably be welcome.

In the Workplace

Relations with Chilean Contacts

In general, Chile is a country that demonstrates relative economic and business efficiency. Chileans are notably proud of the fact that in international surveys, Chile consistently comes out as one of the top countries with high regulatory transparency and relative freedom from corruption. This makes getting things done in Chile easier for most Americans to understand.

That said, there are some notable differences in the way Chileans do business. It is very important, for example, to remember that Chilean professionals put great emphasis on the importance of having an “in” or having connections (“tener pituto”). Often times these connections are established early on at the private schools and universities that upper class Chileans attended as youths. Sometimes the ties are with relatives. These connections are very important in the Chilean work environment; they tend to be seen as important to advance professionally or influence or expedite business outcomes. These perceptions are not necessarily barriers to your relationships with Chilean contacts; by virtue of your position with the Embassy, you will be accorded proper attention in most cases. However, you should be aware of “pituto,” as it can have an impact on how you operate in a Chilean professional or government setting. While it's always good to be discrete in conversations, it is especially wise in Chile, since your comments might end up traveling through the network far beyond your intended target audience. Also, Chileans are more likely than Americans to believe that rules and regulations apply only to those who lack “pituto.” A Chilean contact might, for example, approach you for help with a visa problem, even though the Consular Section neither can nor will ignore or alter the regulations in order to deliver the desired outcome. Your contact might have a hard time believing that you are incapable of influencing the outcome, since you're connected to the Embassy.

There is an important corollary of the general Chilean tendency to believe in the importance of personal connections and “pituto.” It is that business relationships tend to be personal. No Chilean businessman will ever launch into a business meeting with another Chilean without first offering a lengthy greeting to his counterpart and neither should you. If you know your contact has a family, you would do well to ask about the family as well. Genuine concern is appreciated.

The common American practice of wasting no time by launching into the topic at hand is considered rude.

Unlike in some other Latin countries, you should insure that you show up for business meetings on time. Chileans are serious about conducting business in a professional manner and don't appreciate your showing up late. If you expect to be late, you should call to inform your contact and you are well within your rights to expect the same of your contact.

General Tips for the Workplace

At the Embassy, it is important to acknowledge co-workers and contractors at every level with "Buenos días" (Good morning) or "Buenas tardes" (Good afternoon) and perhaps include light conversation like "Cómo está?" or "Cómo fué su fin de semana?" Even if you have an urgent matter you would like to resolve, whether it's with a Chilean colleague or a member of the cleaning staff, it is considered rude to launch into the topic without first offering some kind of greeting.

Supervisor-Employee Relationships

Although statistically Chileans put in a longer workweek than any other workers in Latin America and are considered hardworking generally, there are certain accepted principles that a U.S. supervisor would be wise to keep in mind. Chileans, for example, tend to emphasize family commitments over work; they take their commitments to their extended families very seriously, including taking time off to attend to family responsibilities (of which there can be a considerable number since the inner circle can be quite large). Also, U.S. expatriates working in Chile sometimes describe Chileans as "clock-watchers," but again this often has more to do with obligations toward the family and is not related to a weak work ethic.

In the Chilean context, a supervisor who shows sympathy for his employees is considered a good supervisor. Always spend a little time before you get down to business asking about the employee's personal welfare and about their family, if you know they have one. You do not, however, want to be a supervisor who tries to be too informal or "one of the boys." Doing so will probably lose you respect in the eyes of your subordinates.

Since attitudes toward persons in positions of authority tend to be deferential, it might sometimes be difficult to get constructive suggestions or criticism from Chilean employees, especially from a subordinate. Even with your peers, you might not necessarily find communication easy. Chilean styles of expressing disagreement or dissatisfaction usually fall somewhere between very direct to being very obtuse and artfully responding to you without actually answering your question. Both the Hispanic tradition of courtesy and caution about unnecessary risk-taking in the workplace contribute to their reticence. On the other hand, many Chileans who consider you a colleague or peer won't hesitate to correct your Spanish mistakes. Take it as a complement that they want to help.

Women in the Work Force

Middle- and upper-class women more often than not have maids and this tends to mean that women are freer than their American counterparts to pursue work outside the home (they often

have to in order to maintain a higher standard of living). Chilean women have often been able to enter the world of business, law, academia or government in proportionally higher numbers than is true for women in the U.S. Cabinet ministers, including the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, are or have been women.

That said, sexism is still common in Chilean culture. While the whole cult of machismo is slowly waning, especially in the middle and upper classes, men still tend to dominate decision-making at all levels. Women still tend to be perceived as the weaker sex who either require protection or are subject to mood swings that limit their ability to perform well at the top levels. You will hear this opinion voiced even by some Chilean women. Women tend to be more likely to face hiring discrimination, especially older women. It is still common practice here to advertise receptionist and secretarial positions only to women in a certain age range (generally 25-35) and furthermore to require a photograph with the résumé. The usual defense of this practice is that a company has a right to protect its image. Age discrimination also affects men, but generally to a lesser degree.

One thing you will notice with female Chilean employees is that they might spend an unusual amount of time each day on the telephone talking to family members. Remember that Chileans take very seriously their obligations to their extended families. For women this obligation is magnified, since women tend to be more directly involved in supervising the care of children and elderly parents (as is generally true in the United States, by the way). A certain tolerance for this practice is expected, as long as the time spent isn't excessive.

Everyday Living

Schools

Middle and upper middle class families almost invariably send their children to private schools, which often are located far from the neighborhoods in which they live. Thus, morning rush hour in Santiago is full of small yellow buses and automobiles dashing around town delivering kids to their respective schools. Almost all Chilean private schools require uniforms (International School Nido de Aguilas and The International Preparatory School in Santiago, however, do not).

Many American parents complain that the social atmosphere at local schools tends to be cold and that Chilean parents are rarely inclined to welcome foreigners. While this is especially true in the schools that are almost exclusively Chilean, even U.S. parents at International School Nido de Aguilas complain about this. Again, it boils down to the fact that you are not part of that "inner circle." It takes a lot of initiative to make contact with Chilean parents, but if you're willing to do so, you might be rewarded for your effort.

It is traditional, especially in the elementary grades, to give a gift to your child's teachers at Christmas and again at the end of the school year. Gifts need not be expensive, nor do they need to appear to come from the child. It is a sign of respect and appreciation from the family to the teacher. Your child's bus driver will also appreciate a small token of your appreciation for getting your child to and from school safely.

Shopping

Santiago is a shopper's paradise. Shopping opportunities range from scruffy, colorful street fairs and flea markets to large modern shopping malls and posh streets with upscale boutiques. Shopping in a Chilean setting tends to be a little more frenetic than it is in the United States. In Latin cultures, the force field that constitutes your personal space is much smaller than that to which people from the United States are generally accustomed and you will often feel that people are intruding on your domain. Chileans are, however, slightly more inclined than some cultures to line up or wait their turn, although almost every expatriate at some point will experience a Chilean attempting to cut into line at the grocery or department store. Fortunately, those little ticket machines that determine who is next in line are very common at meat and cheese counters, pharmacies, and clinics.

While shopping in large department and grocery stores tends to resemble shopping in an U.S. setting, shopping in smaller "mom-and-pop" establishments can be a different story. In many small shops, one attendant will wait on you, pulling items you ask for from behind the counter. After you decide what you want, you pay for it at another counter and you might have to go to yet another counter to pick up your bagged or wrapped goods. Don't be surprised if the quality of the service is not to your liking. Shop help are poorly paid, generally poorly trained, and don't have any personal stake in the customer's satisfaction. You tend to get better treatment once the shopkeeper knows you, so it makes sense to repeat your patronage at small stores you like until you are known, even if you initially are not pleased with the service. If after three or four visits you still get poor service, take your business elsewhere.

Many stores in Santiago commonly accept credit cards. If you pay by credit, you might be offered the opportunity to pay on an installment plan ("en cuotas"), but this generally doesn't work if you use a U.S.-based credit card. Bargaining can generally be attempted for purchases at street or craft fairs, discount outlets or open-air markets, but not at most regular establishments like drugstores, supermarkets or shopping malls. Excessive haggling, particularly for smaller purchases, is thought to be tacky, especially if you appear to be well off. It is, however, considered reasonable to ask if the shop offers a discount, especially for big-ticket items. Businesses are often willing to offer discounts for cash or check purchases, but not usually for credit cards. Checks are treated like cash, since the penalties for passing a bad check are severe.

At many large supermarkets, you will hear cashiers ask their customers something like "Donaría parte de su vuelto al Hogar de Cristo?" They are asking you if you would be willing to round up your change so that a local charity (e.g., Hogar de Cristo) can receive it. Most people say yes; it means only a few pesos.

Bag boys are not paid a regular salary at grocery stores. They work for tips. Usually, it is customary to give them anywhere from 200-500 pesos depending on how many groceries they bag and whether they accompany you to your car to unload your purchases.

Public and Private Transportation

Buses and a modern subway system provide inexpensive and reliable service in Santiago, with the caveat that they both get crowded during rush hour and seem to be a magnet for petty thieves. Taxicabs are relatively inexpensive, although they have a tendency to not be as familiar

with the city streets as you would assume they should be. Taxi drivers do not expect tips; however, they are happy if you save them the inconvenience of digging for small change by rounding up the bill. You can also take “colectivos,” which are taxis that follow prescribed routes much the same way buses do, picking up passengers along the way. Most Embassy employees, whether they live in town or the suburbs, prefer to rely on a personal car, either importing one or purchasing one locally.

Chilean driving practices can be maddening to the average American. Drivers tend to tailgate or insist on remaining in the left-hand passing lane even though they are driving well under the posted speed limit. Chilean drivers still generally tend to respect traffic signals and signs, although it is becoming more common to see drivers jump signals. Often times they stop unexpectedly or drift into your lane; they might be on a cellular phone or even glancing at the newspaper. It pays to stay alert.

Traffic circles, which are fairly common in Santiago, present special problems for U.S. drivers. The right of way is supposed to be ceded to the vehicle already in the circle, although buses and trucks, by right of might, often pretend to ignore your existence and advance into the circle regardless. Almost no one stays in his lane in a traffic circle; it is very common for drivers to straddle two lanes or try to exit the circle from the innermost lane, cutting you off in the process.

Fender-benders are very common in the city. Minor traffic accidents are frequently addressed on the spot, with the parties arranging repair or reimbursement as they see fit. Disputed accidents must be reported to the “carabineros,” the uniformed paramilitary police whose responsibilities include transit. In the event of a serious accident, carabineros are good arbitrators and more likely than not to insure that legal proceedings are properly initiated. Do not ever try to bribe a carabinero. They maintain generally high professional standards of honesty and attempts to bribe them will at best insult them and at worst get you into legal trouble.

Parking and speeding regulations tend to be strongly enforced in Chile and it is possible that you will be cited if a carabinero witnesses a transgression. While most employees enjoy full diplomatic immunity from prosecution, you are expected to pay traffic fines. Any traffic violation for which you are cited should be immediately reported to the Embassy’s Management section. Chilean police have been known to show up with an arrest warrant at the home of a diplomat because the diplomat ignored a summons to appear in court to answer for a traffic ticket.

Here is a final note. While road rage is not nearly as common or as violent as in the States, many Embassy personnel have witnessed incidents of it (insulting hand signals, deliberately racing you or trying to cut you off). It is easy to end up in a shouting match with an erratic Chilean driver (who will rarely admit blame). Better to let such people go their way without comment, rather than risk an incident that might escalate into something violent.

Telephones and Telephone Etiquette

Telecommunications services are first-rate and prices are comparable to those in the U.S. However, Telefónica, the national phone company, can be a little slow in installing new

telephone lines, so the telephone and the number assigned to your home usually remain in the name of the landlord or the Embassy when you move in. The phone company issues a set of telephone books (including yellow pages) annually. Telefónica bills (as well as long distance and Internet bills from Telefónica or other carriers) can be paid at a bank or you can pay on-line through a payment service called “Servipag.”

Chileans generally answer the phone by saying “aló?” When you answer the phone, you might be immediately asked who you are (“Quien es?” or “Quien habla?”). This custom bothers many expatriates, particularly in times of increased security, but is not considered particularly rude. Many Chileans—including your maid if you don’t instruct her otherwise—will happily share their identify with the caller. If you really don’t want to identify yourself, ask the caller “Con quien desea hablar?” (“With whom do you wish to speak?”) Usually, they will tell you and the conversation will politely continue.

Barber and Beauty Shops

Appointments are usually not necessary at the small, neighborhood establishments, although more posh-looking salons might prefer that you’ve made an appointment, even if they don’t appear to be busy when you come in. Unless you have some special hair treatment you’re using, the beautician might look askance at you if you bring your own hair-care products. Chile has a myriad of high-quality beauty products available, so this generally isn’t necessary anyway. Rates for barber and salon services are lower than in the U.S; the expected tip is about ten percent.

Theaters, Museums and Cinemas

Santiago has a very lively arts scene, especially from March to September. There are many companies in the city that perform classical music and opera, ballet, modern dance, plays and folkloric programs; top name companies from other countries also perform here. In addition, Santiago harbors a variety of museums and art galleries, some of them top class. Pop bands from the United States and Europe sometimes include Santiago on their tours. International films, including many from the United States, are shown with Spanish subtitles in movie theaters. There are several modern cinemas, including those with up-to-date sound systems and stadium-style seating. The government recently relaxed the movie rating system to allow children under 14 to see movies that previously were available only to children who were 14 to 17 years old. Now children of any age can go see a movie rated for 14 and over, if an adult accompanies them. Many movies that are rated in Chile as suitable for all audiences (“todos espectadores”) are not in fact appropriate for younger children (a recent case in point was the “Austin Powers” series). If you’re unsure, you can check the Internet for U.S. movie ratings and reviews before heading to the theater.

Video rental outlets like Blockbuster Video rent both VHS tapes (subtitled or dubbed) and DVDs (which allow you to select the language you want). You’ll need to have a DVD player that plays disks from Region 4. Most U.S. players play only Region 1 disks; however, many local players can play both Region 4 and Region 1 DVDs.

Restaurants

Santiago harbors a good variety of ethnic restaurants, although a constant complaint is that food geared for Chilean tastes tends to be blander than the same offerings in the States. Restaurants that advertise themselves as typically Chilean serve a lot of beef and pork. Wine, carbonated beverages and water are commonly served with lunch or dinner. Only children ever ask for milk (and only rarely). Eating is continental style, with the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left. The utensils are never switched or crossed. Chileans eat with their hands resting on the table and keep their hands on the table (and not in their laps), even when not occupied with a knife and fork. Elbows on the table during the meal are a sign of poor upbringing, as is using a toothpick.

During the workweek, Chileans tend to eat lunch starting at 1:00 to 1:30 p.m.; they eat even later on weekends. Many restaurants don't even open until 12:30 or 1:00 p.m. for lunch. Dinner usually starts at 9:00 pm; few restaurants open before 8:00 or 8:30 p.m. unless they stay open from lunch to dinner ("horas corrientes") or are American-style restaurants like Bennigans, Ruby Tuesday or TGI Fridays. In some better quality restaurants, it is important to make reservations, since the restaurant operator considers that there is only one sitting per table per evening, given the late start.

"Once"

"Once" (pronounced "OHN-say") is something like high tea in Britain, commonly taken in the late afternoon or early evening, usually as a light meal to tide one over to the late dinner hour. No one really knows the origin of the word "once," but one theory is that in the olden days the man of the house had his evening drink of "aguardiente" at the local bar and "once" was a secret way of referring to this indulgence ("aguardiente" has eleven—or "once"—letters). Whatever the origin, try this pleasant meal at least once during your stay in Chile. The meal can be as simple as a sandwich, an iced coffee or an ice cream. Or the meal can be as elaborate as a fixed-price tea with several courses. Many hotels and outdoor cafés offer "once"; just ask if you're not sure.

Hotels and Motels

The numerous hotels in Santiago—including American chains like Hyatt Regency, Intercontinental, Radisson, Holiday Inn, Ritz Carlton, Best Western, and Marriott—provide the usual range of services. Service is much the same as in any major world capital and the quality is generally very good.

You should be aware that motels do not have the same connotation as motels in the U.S. Almost invariably, motels are rented by the hour and are places where couples (usually unmarried) go for intimate affairs. You normally don't take the family to a motel.

Domestic Help

Because U.S. expatriates tend to be egalitarian in outlook, the way they deal with a maid often leads to confusion or misunderstanding between employee and employer. Americans are often hesitant to clearly state what they want from their maid, because they are unused to supervising domestic help. In addition, Americans often try to become too familiar with their maid, sometimes even to the point of inviting the maid to join the family for dinner or join in social affairs. Don't make the mistake of becoming too familiar with your maid. As their *padrón* or

padrona, you will not earn greater respect or affection for doing so. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case and you will probably end up feeling that your gestures are unappreciated or that you are being taken advantage of. Keep your relationship with your maid cordial, friendly, but formal. Don't, for example, allow your maid to call you by your first name, unless preceded by Señor or Señora. You can address her by her first name, but always use the formal "Usted." You also shouldn't greet your maid with a kiss on the cheek, as you would a friend or colleague; she will probably find this awkward.

Bonuses for domestic help and other routine service providers are customary and expected at "Dieciocho" (September 18th, which is Chilean Independence Day) and Christmas. Your maid, gardener, mailman, doorman, garbage collectors and anyone else who offers you service on a regular basis will expect an "aguinaldo" (gratuity) on those occasions. The amount of money or the gift you give depends on what they do for you and how often. The Community Liaison Office has more information on seasonal tipping or you can ask your colleagues for advice.

Pets

Chileans are very fond of pets, especially dogs, cats, and birds (in that order). When they can afford it, they also have a penchant for horses. There is a surprisingly large commercial sector that caters to pet owners in Chile, especially in Santiago. Regardless of this, however, animals are almost never referred to as surrogate children or "members of the family." In poorer areas, animals tend to have more utilitarian purposes (watch dog, mouser, transportation, or food).

Attitudes about animal birth control are still fairly casual, whether in lower or upper-class neighborhoods. People still commonly believe that animals should not be deprived of their ability to reproduce. Organized, well-funded animal shelters don't exist; where shelters do exist, they are usually under-funded and run by volunteers. It is common to see stray animals on the streets, especially semi-feral dogs running in packs. It's also common for dog owners to think that their dogs should be allowed to roam the neighborhood leash-free, regardless of how menacing the animal might appear to others. People who jog, walk, ride bikes or walk their own pets often are seen with sticks to protect themselves from roaming canines.

Sensitive Topics

On Being "American"

In the United States we are used to referring to ourselves as "Americans", but many Latin Americans also think of themselves as Americans and tend to believe that our proprietary use of the word is a bit presumptuous. Most Americans, however, don't find the term "norteamericano" particularly accurate, since the word can also be used to describe a Mexican or Canadian citizen. Furthermore, most U.S. citizens don't like to be referred to as "gringo." Generally speaking most Chileans are less inclined than some other Latin Americans to take offense at the use of "Americano" or "Americana" to refer to someone from the United States, but it's still better to err on the side of cautious. If you are a U.S. citizen, the best term to use when referring to yourself is "estadounidense," as in "Soy estadounidense." Estadounidense applies to either a man or woman. You can also say "Soy de los Estados Unidos."

Pinochet and Human Rights

Generally speaking, at Chilean social gathering you would do better to listen to others rather than opine on the subject of Chilean politics. Almost invariably, the conversation will lead you back to the coup d'état in 1973 and the politics of the 1970s and 1980s. You'll rarely know until after you've said something you regret that you're speaking to a relative of a "disappeared one" ("desaparecido") who won't want to hear about Pinochet and the economic miracles of his "Chicago Boys." Or you might be talking to a Pinochetista about the virtues of the Allende government—another big mistake. It's still a very sensitive topic and thus dangerous territory to tread on with all but your closest friends.

Religion

Religious freedom and separation of church and state are guaranteed by the Chilean constitution. However, a sizable number of Chileans are regular church-going Catholics and this tends to place the Catholic Church in a position to exercise political influence. The Church still holds some sway over government positions on such things as divorce, education, abortion and the ability of downtown stores to operate on Sundays. On many of these issues, the Church reflects conservative Chilean values that still tend to dominate the political landscape, although some attitudes are slowly changing. Chile does, for example, provide women much easier access to birth control pills than U.S. women have. Discussions have been going on recently to legalize divorce and to allow more downtown businesses to stay open on Sundays. Parents recently were granted more leeway in what they can take their kids to the movie theaters to see. Nonetheless, you might be surprised by how conservative Chileans are on many social topics. If you are a liberal on social questions, you might find yourself quickly in a heated debate you'd rather have avoided. It's usually better to simply listen and learn.

Conclusion

At first glance, Chile looks a lot like a more dramatic version of California. Chile does have a lot of familiar features: American products and ads, a modern, well-functioning infrastructure, modern shopping malls and even some historical similarities like frontier expansion that invite comparisons of national character. There are, however, many differences and being able to recognize and understand them will enhance your experience here.

When in doubt about how to proceed in a social or business setting, don't be afraid to ask your Chilean colleagues. Although they are rightfully proud of their beautiful country, they are also shrewd observers and candid critics. Especially if you come to the table as one who wants to better understand their culture, your questions will be well received and the answers honest. They can offer advice or glimpses that you won't get from a book or a guide like this one.

Additional Reading

Culture Shock Chile: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette, by Susan Roraff and Laura Camacho, Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company, Portland, 1999.

My Invented Country: A Nostalgic Journey Through Chile by Isabel Allende, Harper-Collins; May 2003.

Culture and Customs of Chile by Guillermo Castillo-Feliu, Greenwood Publishing Group, June 2000.

How to Survive in the Chilean Jungle by John Brennan and Alvaro Taboada, Dolmen Ediciones, Caracas, 2002.